

The first white incursion into Salmon Creek Ravine seems to have been by water. On Sept. 9, 1870, John G. Parker purchased a foothold of 9.7 acres along the shore at the mouth of Salmon Creek ("*document 2344*"). C.P. Stone acquired 37.25 acres of shoreline property adjoining George Oulett's (Olette?) northern boundary ("*document 2675*") on October 10, 1871. In December 1864 Oulett had purchased most of the beachfront property along Burien's northern coastline, making him the first landowner along Burien's coast and inland. His land ownership precedes any other in the area by more than four years. (Salmon Creek Neighborhood Plan, Oct. 2004, pp. 7-9).

In October 1875 George and Elizabeth Oulette (Olette?) looked southward, buying 100 acres, farming utensils and household furniture from William Brown in what is today the Miller Creek area of Normandy Park. Besides farming, Oulette was involved in timber harvesting in the area. His children attended Sunnysdale School. (Wonderful World of Woods and Water: History of Normandy Park, Helen Kludt et al, p. 5)

Others were also drawn to the Salmon Creek/north Burien area for their impressive stands of Douglas fir, the finest construction timber in the world. (Lumbermen referred to it as "green gold.") Two such men--Samuel B. Carr, from Red Oak, Iowa, and Thomas Hood, an alleged deserter from the British Navy--began the first logging operation in what is now northwest Burien sometime around 1887, on land owned by the Kakeldies on Seola Beach. The operation worked its way up what is now Seola Beach Drive onto the White Center plateau. In 1891 they moved operations to Salmon Creek, but gave up after a year due to the steepness of the ravine and wet hillsides. They purchased acreage higher on the plateau in the vicinity of Oak Park, which they logged and subdivided.

Sam Carr was known as "Long Sam" due to his long legs and ability to work steep hillsides by himself. The Salmon Creek ravines, however, proved to be so steep and slick that no one could stay with it for very long. Carr and Hood thus were able to log only about a quarter-mile up the Salmon Creek canyon, which was a tough challenge even for "Long Sam." Presumably they used the same method of logging in Salmon Creek that they had used at Seola Beach: oxen would pull the logs down a "skid road" to the beach (Stranding Lane?), where they would be "kicked" into the Sound at low tide. The high tide would then raise them up, and a back boom would be placed around the logs. A tug would then pull the log boom to Puget Sound lumber mills. (White Center Remembers, pp. 13-14)

One of the destinations for the log rafts towed from Salmon Creek and Seola Beach (and Seahurst, Eagle Landing and other Burien parks?) was probably Port Blakely, a lively deepwater port on the southern end of Bainbridge Island, eight miles west of Seattle. One of the largest sawmills in Puget Sound--and perhaps the world--at the time, the Port Blakely Mill Company, a robust, 7-day-a-week operation, had an insatiable appetite for local timber, which was cut into lumber of all sizes, loaded onto hundreds of ships a year and shipped to ports throughout the world. Nearby Hall Brothers Shipyard also used the freshly sawn lumber to build 77 wooden schooners between 1881 and 1903.

Today nothing but wind, sand and water remains of Port Blakely, a victim of modernization of the lumber and maritime industries. (Tall Ships on Puget Sound, The Marine Photographs of Wilhelm Hester, Robert A. Weinstein, University of Washington Press, 1978). But logs from Salmon Creek and other Burien parks no doubt found their way to this and other Puget Sound mills (Seattle, Tacoma, Des Moines?), connecting them to our own histories.

Later, "Carvella Station" on the Burien Streetcar Line was probably named after the Carr estate, which was "all orchard" from 16th to 20th Ave. S.W. near 100th St. The estate also had a tall windmill which, along with the home, was torn down when the estate was subdivided for homes. This was probably the estate of Rev. Hamilton Carr, Sam's brother. (White Center Remembers, pp.17 & 99) In 1902 Carr moved his family to Sunnydale, where he built a sawmill.

Local historian Clarence Gresset states that the Carr and Hood enterprise brought in the first payrolls to White Center. Starting at a dollar a day, including room and board, the scale gradually increased to as high as \$3.50 a day for special categories. These were 12-hour days, or as long as there was daylight. (White Center Remembers, pp. 1-9).

Logging was a prime economic factor throughout the Highline area, especially between 1890 and 1920. The first local entrepreneurs were the sawmill owners, realizing the need for lumber in the struggling young community. Logs not needed for homes were dragged to the skid roads, skidded into the Sound, tied into rafts and floated to the mills. At times the logs were hauled by wagon to the nearest sawmill. Others were split into cordwood and sold in Seattle for 75 cents a cord. (Many Roads, p. 60)

As Angelo Balzarini recalled: The years of 1899 (?) to 1915 were years of homesteading, and the gradual influx of people coming to this area. They were years of concentrating on earning a living and working out transportation problems. 1915 to 1918 were taken up by a great need for poles for the liberty ships used in World War One. Many of these poles came from the Burien area. 152nd Street was logged out as well as much of Gregory Heights and the Seahurst area. These logs were transported by rail (our railroad to Salmon Creek to a sawmill there).

The remains of a partly submerged "Corduoy Road" can still be seen in the swirling waters of Salmon Creek today (photograph from King County Natural Resources and Parks, Water and Land Resources Division, Miller/Walker and Salmon Creek Basin Planning Effort Website). These skids were greased by a crew of men slopping out grease from buckets, providing the slickest and quickest route for logs to be dragged down the "skidroad" through the canyon to the Sound.

Skid roads went with ox-team logging. Small logs were embedded crossways on the trail, like railroad ties only farther apart. Big logs were dragged lengthways over the road logs. Anyone who has lived in the Puget Sound country for 40 or 50 years can remember seeing traces of skid roads in the woods, with the cross-logs rotting by then, because donkey engines long before had replaced oxen. A few skid roads remained in use in spite

of machinery, but it was for small-scale logging with horses, such as a farmer hauling out trees or a little mill working a left over patch of timber. (Our Burien)

Access into the shoreside areas of the Salmon Creek Ravine/north Burien area that would become residential neighborhoods was not really possible until logging had cleared much of the plateau above. The first roads were for the timber operations and went from the beachhead at Seola Beach up the hill onto the plateau and over to the top of the ridge near Myer's Way. This was the early land link with the rest of Seattle. A few rough and muddy roads swept to the east and came in to Edward S. Solomon's parcel, 320 acres encompassing what is now known as the Mayfair and Hermes Depression. Local timber fed the mills in White Center, producing logs suitable for local building and shingle mills, as well as jobs. Development during this era consisted of clearing the land, selling the timber and then settling the land. Logging paid from \$1 to \$3.50 a day in wages--although the work was hard and sunup to sundown. (Salmon Creek Neighborhood Plan, Oct. 2004, p. 7-9)

Some of the families homesteading along the northern reaches of Salmon Creek Ravine were the O'Days, Busses and Kunhausens. The O'Days' 10-acre parcel lay between 18th and 21st S.W. and 112th and 114th—possibly the northern edge of the Ravine at the time. Michael O'Day also tended about 10 acres of potatoes, a major source of income for the family.

The O'Days' nearest neighbors were the Busses, who in 1906 built a cabin on 10 acres near 116th S.W. and 21st S.W. Paul and Mary Busse and their daughter Minnie Katherine chose this spot because it lay on higher ground than their previous home on the Duwamish River, which had flooded the previous November. South of the Busses lived the Kunhausen family. Despite having six children of their own and a modest two-room shanty for shelter, the Kunhausens took the Busses in until they finished their own cabin.

Paul Busse worked as a "powder man" for Jacob Ambaum, and did much of the blasting work on many of the highways and roads between White Center and Burien, especially Ambaum Boulevard and the Highland Park/Lake Burien Rail Line. Busse's daughter, Minnie Katherine Jensen, recalls that while her father did not lay the rails, the tracks had a tendency to spread, making it difficult for the cars to stay on them. She would know: she rode the rails every day to West Seattle High School. Minnie's second husband, Chris Jensen, was a conductor on the Burien streetcar line. (White Center Remembers, pp. 60-62)

Salmon Creek was frequently fished by the locals. Essel and Otis Haselton, who had a 30-acre farm between 128th and 131st S.W. from Ambaum Road to 8th Avenue S.W., were one such couple. "I guess Otis thought I was a pretty fair fisherman," recalled Essel in a Feb. 5, 1964 White Center News article. "He always sent me on ahead and I usually caught most of the fish. Salmon Creek was much bigger then and full of nice trout." (White Center Remembers, p. 41)

In 1919, Frank Parente's father started Salmon Creek Grocery (on Ambaum Boulevard

S.W. and S.W. 116th Street?). He closed the store in 1930, hurt by the Depression and the closing of the street car line. The “Toonerville Trolley” had stopped nearby--Salmon Creek, as well as stops at Hazel Valley and Summit (Seahurst?). The stop at 116th was described as a siding and "meet-um-station," located in front of Laugerquist place. At 120th the tracks made a semi-circle around Salmon Creek, before continuing on to Seahurst and Lake Burien. (White Center Remembers, pp. 1-9).

The Lake Burien car line, or “Toonerville Trolley” as it was affectionately called, ran from Riverside in the north to Seahurst in the south, a distance of about 9 miles. It began operations in June of 1912 and made its last run on July 15, 1931. It was the only line of its kind in Seattle—entirely single-tracked, over private right-of-way. It played a key part in the growth and development of the Highline area. (Many Roads, pp.100-101).

On weekends a lot of people rode the streetcar out from the city and got off at Parente's store, where they could buy ice cream and whatnot, then follow the creek down to the Sound. "As kids we used to walk down there," recalls Parente. "That would have been in the '30s, about '33 or '34. There was an old skid road where they did logging. They would log the logs and skid them down to the Sound, and then they'd barge them away. . . . " (Frank Parente Oral History, Highline Historical Society Website)

(It makes sense that those wishing to go down to the beach from the Salmon Creek streetcar stop would follow Salmon Creek Ravine. As late as 1955, Southwest 116th Street still did not connect with Ambaum Boulevard. That year residents petitioned the county to bridge the head of the Salmon Creek Ravine on 116th Street just west of Ambaum, to create better access to the Shorewood area.) Shorewoodonthesound.org website, 1950-1959

Salmon Creek was originally a 4-mile stream draining the White Center plateau. The creek supported a “small but healthy population of sea-run cutthroat trout and coho salmon,” as well as chum, Chinook salmon and steelhead. (Salmon Creek Feasibility Report, May 1994, p. 1) In the 1940s, however, Joe Burke (see below), whose land surrounded the mouth of salmon creek, placed rock at the mouth of the stream, effectively creating a “permanent blockage to salmonid migration.” Burke claimed he wanted to eliminate the bad smells occurring in the fall when spawned salmon died and their carcasses decomposed along the stream bank. As of the mid-1990s, the property was owned by Mario Segale.

Following the creation of the permanent stream blockage by Burke, King County installed a culvert system beneath Shorewood Drive, which crosses the Salmon Creek Ravine just upstream from Segale’s property. This culvert is also considered a barricade to salmonid migration due to its relatively steep grade, high water velocity and shallow water depth within the culvert.

Because of these two migratory blockages within the first 800 feet of the mouth of the stream, “there is no anadromous salmonid production occurring within Salmon Creek, despite there being over 2,860 feet of habitat suitable for salmonid spawning and rearing

immediately upstream of Shorewood Drive. Field estimates of lost fish production suggest that as many as 250 adult fish per year are being lost as a result of migratory blockages.” (Salmon Creek Feasibility Report, p. 1)

In recent years groups such as the Shorewood Community Club and Trout Unlimited have worked to restore the ravine, remove the migratory blockages and re-establish salmon runs in Salmon Creek. Property owners along the mouth of Salmon Creek, however, are still concerned about potential odor problems from spawned-out salmon carcasses, and question the wisdom of public investment in restoring the salmon runs.

Prior to 1980, high water flows in Salmon Creek eroded banks and carried large amounts of sediment downstream into Puget Sound during large storms. Bank erosion and sediment blockages in the channel and culverts caused damage and flooding to private property in both the upper and lower stream basin. In 1980, the White Center Drainage Improvement Project (Phase 1) was begun. Improvements at Kingston Pond, Lake Hicks and Salmon Creek resulted in more consistent and less destructive stream flows in Salmon Creek.

In 1993, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife proposed adding more woody debris to Salmon Creek to improve pool habitat for fish, pending a commitment from the County to remove the blockage beneath Shorewood Drive. Currently, Salmon Creek is believed to support small numbers of cutthroat trout and sculpin, as well as planted juvenile coho salmon. (Salmon Creek Fish Passage Feasibility Report, May 1994, p. 2)

Salmon Creek meanders for three-fifths of a mile between Ambaum Boulevard, where it spills out of a 48-inch pipe, and Shorewood Drive. The upper reach and surrounding area lies within Burien’s undeveloped Salmon Creek Ravine Park. Despite encroaching suburbia, Salmon Creek appears to have dodged the severe erosion problems plaguing most urban streams—probably due to the 18-inch high flow bypass pipe.

The Salmon Creek drainage basin is currently about 1,100 acres in size (just under 2 square miles). It contains two distinct geo-regions: a rolling upland of glacial till containing wetlands, small lakes, and a piped drainage system; and an outwash plain descending to Puget Sound, which contains Salmon Creek and several tributaries. The outwash sands exposed along Salmon Creek also extend beneath the till of the upper plateau, creating a conduit for groundwater to the Creek.

Based on 1909 topographic information, much of the current Salmon Creek drainage basin historically flowed northward toward Longfellow Creek, with the old drainage divide being located between Mallard Lake (Kingston Pond) and Lake Garrett (Lake Hicks). The area tributary to Salmon Creek was thus historically much smaller, about 500 acres, less than half its current size. At the turn of the century, Lake Garrett was a small closed depression, and it is likely that it only rarely, if at all, overflowed into the Salmon Creek basin. With no inflow or outflow, it is likely that the lake was marsh-like in character, perhaps even a peatland.

Air photos from 1936 appear to retain the original drainage divide between Kingston Pond and Lake Garrett, but by 1959 the existing street network is largely complete (air photo coverage, White Center area). By 1970 current development density in much of the basin was already seen. It is likely that diversion of a portion of the Longfellow drainage basin occurred between these two dates, or sometime in the 1960s. No flow control or water quality regulations were in place at the time of basin development. The first drainage standards in King County were enacted in 1979, and they were significantly lacking by today's standards.

The use of an old sewer line--the old government line--for stormwater flows began in the late 1970s. In the 10 or so years between the time the Salmon Creek basin was "enlarged" in the 1960s and the use of the old government line to by-pass stormwater around Salmon Creek directly to Puget Sound, local flooding and stream erosion would have intensified. Flooding in the Lake Garrett depression would have intensified as runoff from additional areas was delivered to the lake as drainage, and as impervious surfaces replaced forest and vacant grassy areas. With the pumping of excess water to control flooding around Lake Garrett, flows over and above those handled from the historical basin were delivered to Salmon Creek.

Conversion of the old government line to a stormwater conveyance line restored some of the hydrologic functions of the original drainage basin (Historical Changes in the Salmon Creek Basin, King County Natural Resources and Parks, Water and Land Resources website)

Located in northwest Burien, the heavily wooded Salmon Creek ravine, thanks to its preservation, includes a year-round stream and is home to a variety of wildlife. The natural environment of the Salmon Creek neighborhood is comprised of a variety of natural features, including Puget Sound shorelines, streams, wetlands, and varying degrees of steep slopes. This variation in the environment adds to the diversity of the wildlife bordering and within the neighborhood. A variety of wildlife can be found in Salmon Creek ravine, which contains approximately one mile of stream and little over one mile of tributaries, some of which are spring fed. Animals common to the ravine include raccoon, red fox, muskrat bats and grey squirrels. (Salmon Creek Neighborhood Plan, Oct. 2004, p. 12 & p. 17)

The Salmon Creek Ravine is considered a "passive park," with a series of trails and access roads. Natural features include Salmon Creek and a number of small tributaries feeding into it. The Park contains some wetlands associated with the creek and feeder tributaries. Other characteristics include second growth timber and a variety of wildlife. (Salmon Creek Neighborhood Plan, Oct. 2004, p. 20)

Salmon Creek Ravine (and Seahurst Park) are a remnant of the verdant fir and cedar forest that once cloaked the Highline area. They also contain vestiges of the logging industry that flourished here. The old springboard notches are still visible in the ghostly cedar stumps scattered among the sword ferns and devil's club, as are the mossy, overgrown scars of the "skid roads" where they scoured the hillsides.

Standring Lane straddles the mouth of Salmon Creek. As late as the 1940s, there may have been a sawmill in the ravine (possibly where the sewage treatment plant is now?), just up from Standring Lane. "I think Burke was in charge at the time," recalls Louise Baker. "There was a little tiny sawmill down in the ravine, and I think Burke cut and sold the timber there. Yes, I saw the mill. In fact we could see all the way up the ravine to Ambaum where the alcoholic treatment center (Shick Shadel) is now. Burke had cleared it with that little sawmill there. They took almost all the virgin timber out of there. I suppose he planned to sell all the property down there. . . .

"The old mill was very small, and it was only there for maybe three years, and then it was kind of abandoned. Then one summer some kids were playing around it and it started a fire, and it burned this whole bank. . . Then they got rid of it. The community wanted to build a clubhouse down where the

([Louise Baker Oral History](#), Highline Historical Society Website)

Shorewood resident Fred Henzi substantiates that claim. Burke told him that he logged all the timber on "Shorewood Hill" in the late 1930s or early 1940s. Burke also installed a water wheel and power plant to supply himself (and his mill?) with electricity. (Telephone interview with Fred Henzi, August 10, 2007)

Joe Burke lived on the beach at Standring Lane where Salmon Creek flowed into the Sound. He owned a millworking company in Ballard. He also provided the residents of Shorewood with water piped from Salmon Creek in old wooden pipes wrapped with wire. These sometimes leaked and caused other problems, which Shorewood residents were not too happy about. Eventually Burke and his customers "buried the hatchet" in a ceremony reported on in the White Center News on [date, photo?](#) Salmon Creek Ravine, with its deep woods and rushing waters, also provided endless hours of entertainment and adventure for the area's youth, including this writer. (Interview with publisher Jerry Robinson)

In the early 1970s, King County planners proposed a series of interconnected pedestrian and bicycle routes throughout the region, called the "Forward Thrust urban trail system." The Salmon Creek portion of this trail would have followed the drainage of Salmon Creek up into the White Center plateau, along the shore of Hicks Lake (Lake Garrett) and eastward to connect with the Duwamish Ridge trail and eventually the Green River.

Hikers traveling westward through the Salmon Creek Ravine toward the Sound also could have linked up with a trail running along the shore—north along Marine View Drive to West Seattle, and south through Seahurst Park and on to Normandy Park and Des Moines.

(I don't believe this ambitious plan never fully materialized—at least the Burien portion. Lack of coordination among several local agencies and municipalities, disagreement about potential trail use and users, litigation from affected private property owners,

funding and other issues proved to be “roadblocks” to the original plan.) (“Planners completing trail routes,” Highline Times, March 10, 1971.)

In 1988 Bob Wise and his committee tracked developments of the "Shorewood Developers" and led the fight in the three-year battle to prevent plunder of the Salmon Creek area. (Shorewoodonthesound.org, 1980-1989). Shorewood resident Fred Henzi recalls that heavy construction equipment was already going in and out of the area, cutting trees and preparing the land for housing development. But even the would-be developers recognized the dangers inherent in trying to subdue this fragile environment, laced, as it was, with steep hillsides and slippery slopes.

In 1990 the Salmon Creek Greenbelt was established, thanks to the efforts of Bob Wise and his committee. On June 18th, King County took charge of 77 acres, the first piece of property to be preserved as part of the Washington State Open Spaces Initiative.

In 1991 the Salmon Creek clean-up and improvement program began, with over 1,000 seedlings planted by volunteers. The "road" which winds up from the sewer plant to Ambaum has also been filled with crushed rock, an improvement over the wet and swampy conditions which used to dominate this route.

Today the Salmon Creek Greenbelt affords nature hikes right behind the sewer treatment plant. Red foxes, bald eagles, osprey and even otters have been spotted in the area. (Shorewoodonthesound.org website, 1990-1999)

The Nisqually earthquake on February 28th, 2001 caused a massive landslide in Salmon Creek Ravine. A new creek, locally dubbed “Earthquake Creek,” was tapped from the aquifer and tripled the volume of Salmon Creek. (Shorewoodonthesound.org website, 2000-2009)